

altar / alter

An **altar** (n.) is an elevated place (like a type of table) where religious ceremonies are performed, or where offerings are left for the gods or spirits:



Image source: [Sanbec](#)

The verb **alter** is a more formal word for change.

- Art has the potential to **alter** our perception of the world.
- These vegetables have been genetically **altered** to be richer in vitamins.
- You can re-publish the article in its original form; it may not be **altered**.

The noun form is **alteration**:

- I made a few **alterations** to the project proposal.
= I made a few **changes** to the project proposal.
- May I suggest one **alteration** to the schedule for the conference?
= May I suggest one **change** to the schedule for the conference?

Again, this word is a little more formal. In casual spoken English, we can simply use the word “change” as both a noun and a verb.

appraise / apprise

The verb **appraise** means to evaluate, especially in an official way in which a grade will be given or the value of something determined:

- The teachers will **appraise** the students' presentations.
- A car dealership **appraises** the value of used cars.
- Managers often **appraise** their employees once per year.

The noun form is **appraisal**, meaning an evaluation:

- Please give me your honest **appraisal** of the book I've written.
- We need to conduct a thorough **appraisal** of the property before buying it.

The verb **apprise** means to inform or notify. You can **apprise** (someone) **of** (some news). If your colleague Gina wasn't at an important meeting, you will later need to **apprise** Gina of the decisions that were made at the meeting.

Another common structure is to say that (someone) is, was, or has been **apprised of** (the news):

- The President **has been apprised of** the latest developments in the crisis.
- The students **were apprised of** the increase in tuition.
- Please keep me **apprised of** this situation.

keep me apprised

compliment / complement

These two words are pronounced the same, but they are spelled differently and have different meanings.

Compliment can be both a noun and a verb. A **compliment** is a positive comment about someone or something, for example: "You have beautiful eyes!"

And the verb **compliment** (or the expression "pay someone a compliment") means to make a positive comment:

- He **complimented me** on my web design skills.
- He **paid me a compliment** on my web design skills.

The adjective **complimentary** means "free":

- At this hotel, breakfast is **complimentary**.

- You get a **complimentary** cookie when you order coffee at that café.

Complement can also be a noun or a verb. If two things complement each other, it means they go well together; they make each other appear better.

- That necklace is the perfect **complement** to your outfit.
- My business partner and I really **complement** each other. We make a good team.

The adjective **complementary** means that two things are different, but go together well – you could say, “My business partner and I have **complementary** skills.”

discreet / discrete

These words are pronounced the same, and they are both adjectives.

Discrete means separate, distinct, individual:

- The two companies have a partnership, but they are **discrete** entities.
- We offer three **discrete** service plans: internet only, internet + cell phone, and internet + cell phone + TV.

Discreet describes something that is modest and does not call attention to itself:

- The photographer at the funeral remained **discreet** and respectful.
- She **discreetly** adjusted her bra strap, which was falling down her shoulder.

When you describe a person as **discreet**, it means that person can handle sensitive topics with tact (good manners and professionalism).

in / into / inside / within

In and **inside** are the same in many cases. You can say:

- We are **in** the house.
= We are **inside** the house.
- The clothes are **in** the closet.
= The clothes are **inside** the closet.

The word **inside** implies that the thing is physically enclosed - it is in a container (a box, a vehicle, a building with walls, etc.)

This means that when talking about location, time, being included, or other situations where you are *not* physically surrounded, you should use **in**, not **inside**:

- I live **in** Australia.
- My birthday is **in** July.
- He plays guitar **in** a band.

The word **into** implies movement or transformation:

- She jumped **into** the swimming pool.
- We went **into** the house.
- The car crashed **into** a telephone pole.
- The caterpillar turned **into** a butterfly.

With the verbs put, throw, drop, and fall, you can use either into or in:

- He **put** the card **into/in** his pocket.
- I **threw** the paper cup **into/in** the trash.
- She lost her balance and **fell into/in** the river.

The word **within** means "inside the limits" – and in this case the limits are non-physical. They can be limits of time or distance, or an area of understanding:

- The results will be delivered **within fourteen days**.
- Most car accidents occur **within five miles** of home.

We also have some expressions using **within**:

- **within earshot** = at a distance where you are able to hear something (such as a conversation)
- **within reason** = to the degree that good judgment would allow
- **within reach / within one's grasp** = able to be taken with your hand, or able to be accomplished

You can also use **within** to describe a person's inner feelings (in this case, you can also use "inside"):

- He tried to hide the anger burning **within/inside** him.

moral / morale

As a noun, a **moral** is the lesson learned from a story - often used in the expression "**the moral of the story.**"

The plural form, **morals**, has a different meaning. It refers to a person's standards of determining right and wrong behavior:

- The doctor refused to perform an abortion because it was against her **morals**.
- He has no **morals** whatsoever - he'll do anything and everything to get rich.

The adjective **moral** refers to things related to ethics (matters of right/wrong):

- If you know that a child is being abused, you have a **moral** obligation to inform the police.
- It is often used with **moral** obligation/responsibility/duty

The noun **morale** is completely different!

First of all, there is a pronunciation difference:

- **moral**: MOR - al
- **morale**: mor - ALE

Morale means the state of spirit/emotions of a group of people - their general confidence and cheerfulness.

- If a sports team has high **morale**, it means the members of the team are feeling good and optimistic.
- If **morale** is low among employees of a company, it means the employees are feeling negative and not motivated.

principal / principle

A **principle** (n.) is a fundamental idea, belief, philosophy, or rule:

- My daughter is learning the basic **principles** of physics in her science class.
- Power in the hands of the people is one of the key **principles** of democracy.
- He would never steal from the company – he's a man of high **principles**.

The word **principal** has three meanings:

1. **As an adjective:** the main or most important
The lake is the **principal** water source for the city.
2. **As a noun:** the director of an elementary, middle, or high school
Students who misbehave are sent to the **principal's** office.
3. **As a noun (finance):** the original amount of a debt (not counting the interest - the extra money that accumulates over time as the debt is not paid):
At a 10% interest rate, a **principal** of \$1,000 will accumulate \$100 of interest.

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